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ABSTRACT

The study examined social behaviors of 19 gifted and 19 nongifted preschool children. A social behavioral inventory was developed from repeated observations of interactions collected during an 8 week pilot study. Four general categories of behavior were observed and analyzed: verbal positive (greeting, conversation, compliment, concern, laughing, and singing); verbal negative (name calling, reprimand, exclusion, abrasive language, and whining); physical positive (hug, pat, hand holding, material sharing, smiling, and running with a peer); and physical negative (threat by gesture, push, grab, hit, and rock/sand throwing). Frequency sampling revealed differences in frequency of positive verbal and positive physical behaviors, with the nongifted Ss exhibiting a higher rate of these behaviors than gifted Ss. The relationship of low incidence of verbal and physical behaviors among gifted Ss to cognitive and social development is posed as an important topic for future research. (CL)

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A Comparative Analysis of Social Behaviors of Gifted and Non-Gifted Preschool Children

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Abstract

Social behaviors are important developmental characteristics of gifted and non-gifted preschool children. This study investigates these behaviors and extends the limited research in this area. A behavioral inventory, including positive and negative categories, was developed from repeated observations of 19 gifted and 19 non-gifted children. A systematic comparison of social behaviors revealed a greater frequency of positive verbal and physical behaviors for the non-gifted. However, percentage comparisons of both groups revealed an overall equality of frequency among categories of social behavior. Previous evidence of developmental differences of gifted and non-gifted children were discussed. In addition, findings were related to comparative research with social behaviors of the non-gifted child.

A Comparative Analysis of Social Behaviors of Gifted and Non-Gifted Preschool Children

Social behaviors are important developmental characteristics of gifted and non-gifted preschool children. However, studies between the two groups of children that analyze common and differential behavior patterns are extremely limited. Indeed, the focus of much literature related to gifted preschool children has been concentrated in the area of academic achievement (Abroms & Collins, 1977; Naumann, 1974; Terman, 1954; Terman & Oden, 1947). Academic precocity among the gifted has been investigated by researchers who specifically analyzed linguistic competency, mathematical ability, and artistic capacity (Gallagher, 1975; George, Cohn, & Stanley, 1979; Stanley, George, & Solano, 1977; Robinson, Jackson, & Roedell, 1978; Roedell, Jackson, & Robinson, 1980; Terman, 1954; Terman & Oden, 1947). Although Roedell et al. (1980) has investigated linguistic differences in a comparative study of gifted and non-gifted preschool children, there is limited comparative research. This study proposes to expand the field of comparative research with gifted and non-gifted children in the area of social behaviors.

Researchers have recognized that social behavior studies of the gifted has been a neglected field of study (Jarecky, 1959; Naumann, 1974). One of the few studies currently available, Lehman and Erdwins (1981), investigated the emotional and social development of gifted children in third grade against a group of average children in sixth grade. Various social and personality tests were administered to measure and compare differences. They confirmed what Milgram and Milgram (1976) had found in their study, that gifted children have an overall positive picture of themselves and are better secured in their family and school relationships. Other researchers also support this contention that gifted children develop into socially competent adults who tend to be well-rounded individuals (Horne & Dupuy, 1981; Robinson et al., 1978; Roedell et al., 1980).

On the other hand, traditional research involving non-gifted children has focused on the many aspects of social development. For example, social behaviors of non-gifted children (Bandura, 1973; Blurton Jones, 1972; Gottman & Putallaz, 1981; Smith & Connolly, 1972) have been analyzed with resulting definitive descriptions of social interaction patterns. Social interaction as an important function of learning for the non-gifted has been investigated (Anderson & Messick, 1974; Goldman, 1981;

Hartup, 1970; Parten, 1932; Reuter & Yunik, 1973), as well as the frequency of prosocial and aggressive behaviors (Allen, 1981; Bandura, 1973; Charlesworth & Hartup, 1967; Hartup & Coates, 1967; Mussen & Eisenberg-Berg, 1977; Yarrow & Waxler, 1976). Research has been slow to investigate these same concerns with gifted preschool children.

The family is an important factor in the social and emotional development of children. The affect of parenting is a significant variable, and literature is available regarding parent-child interaction specific to non-gifted children, but the literature specific to gifted children and their interaction with their parents is limited in availability (Hackney, 1981). It has been hypothesized that the gifted child in a family has many effects on the structure of relationships (Peterson, 1977). Siblings become jealous and competition for parental attention increases; the parents themselves become affected by their gifted child in such a way that priorities are often rearranged to accommodate and fulfill this child's educational objectives (Rose, 1979).

Parents of gifted children are often given reprimanding looks for "bragging" about their child. Yet these parents experience equal and often more stressful developmental concerns

for their children. In a survey by Coleman (1982) of parents of gifted children, she stressed that parents of gifted children advise each other to accept their children "as they are and to avoid projecting their own desires" (p. 48).

There are identifiable features of gifted preschool children (Abroms & Collins, 1977; Coleman, 1982; Roeper, 1977). The children are usually active individuals with organized, intelligent questions when they have been stimulated to verbalize. These children usually show high confidence in themselves and are sensitive to the needs of others. This is not to imply that all gifted children are "class A" people. Many gifted preschoolers experience academic difficulties and often have manual dexterity problems when writing (Coleman, 1982). However, there is not enough evidence to show significant verbal and physical social differences between gifted and non-gifted preschool children.

This study is concerned with investigating the hypothesis that no significant differences in verbal and physical behavior exist between gifted and non-gifted preschool children.

Method

Subjects. Two groups of children participated in this study. Both groups' familial socioeconomic status ranged from middle to

upper-middle class. The first group consisted of 19 gifted preschool children: ten boys and nine girls who were enrolled in a program for the gifted and talented at a major university. The boys ranged in age from 4 years-2 months to 5 years-3 months, with a mean age equal to 57.5 months. The girls ranged in age from 4 years-2 months to 5 years-3 months, with a mean age equal to 56.4 months. The mean I.Q. for this group as measured by the Stanford-Binet was equal to 141.85.

The second group consisted of 19 non-gifted preschool children: nine boys and ten girls who were enrolled in an urban private school. The boys ranged in age from 3 years-6 months to 5 years-5 months, with a mean age equal to 50.8 months. Girls ranged in age from 3 years-4 months to 5 years-1 month, with a mean age equal to 50.8 months. No data was available concerning intelligence quotient, but the teacher's judgments were that the children were in the I.Q. range of 90-110.

Procedure. Observable behaviors were assessed through analysis of recorded incidents of naturally occurring interactions. Random observations of gifted and non-gifted children were collected during the mid-morning over a sixteen (16) week period. We were able to minimize the children's awareness of

the observer by removing the observer from the flow of interaction. Weather conditions permitted observations to be made during outdoor free time play periods. The observer recorded interaction from a sufficient distance to guarantee no disruption of the social behavior.

The social behavior inventory was developed from repeated observations of interactions collected during a pilot study of eight (8) weeks of observations. Preliminary analysis resulted in the revision of the behavioral coding scale previously used by Levine, Elzey, and Lewis (1969). In the revised inventory, four general categories were used: verbal positive and physical positive behaviors as well as verbal negative and physical negative behaviors. Verbal positive behavior consisted of six specific expressions: Greeting, Conversation, Compliment, Concern, Laughing, and Singing. Verbal negative behavior was distinguished in terms of specific noxious responses: Name Calling, Reprimand, Exclusion, Abrasive Language, and Whining. Physical positive behaviors included responses scored as pleasant: Hug, Pat, Holding Hands, Sharing Materials, Smiling, and Running with a Peer. The negative physical behavior included specific attack behaviors: Threat by Jesture, Push, Grab, Hit, and Rock/Sand Throwing. Specific descriptions of

behaviors were taken from Blurton Jones (1972).

Data were collected using a frequency sampling method. This sampling method is usually recommended when coding frequently occurring behaviors. Rather than focusing on a group of several children, we chose to watch a single, randomly chosen child for a 20 minute period, recording all episodes of behavior. When two episodes occurred simultaneously, both were recorded. This procedure maximized the information on the behaviors of individual children. All episodes of positive and negative behaviors were scored. If an episode consisted of an extended sequence of behavior, each behavior was scored separately, but the sequence was kept intact by noting the number of behaviors it contained. The observer reliability was subjectively judged to be in the range from .95 to .98 by several researchers knowledgeable of the observer's previous recordings.

Results

A chi-square test was performed between positive and negative verbal behavior. This indicated non-statistical significance with an even distribution throughout the categories, as the gifted and non-gifted children engaged in equal positive and negative verbal behaviors, $\underline{x}^2(1) = .129$, $p < .05$.

Insert Table I about here

Table I presents a summary of initiated verbal social behaviors in gifted and non-gifted preschool children and indicates the Total Observed Frequency, Percentage of Sub-total Behaviors Within Category, Percentage of All Behaviors, and Percent of All Children. The observed frequencies will be highlighted in some detail as there were recognizable differences between the two groups in a number of behavioral categories.

The Positive Verbal Behavior category consisted of definite numerical differences between gifted and non-gifted children. Conversation was especially significant: the gifted children scoring 69 Observed Frequencies and the non-gifted children scoring 133 Observed Frequencies, with an Observed scoring difference of 64 points. The behavior, Concern, showed an Observed Frequency difference of 8 with the gifted children and 0 with the non-gifted children. There were differences between gifted and non-gifted children in the Compliment behavior, 4 to 0, respectively. However, this result needs to be interpreted cautiously because of the limited responses.

The Negative Verbal Behavior category consisted of only

two significant numerical differences. The gifted children scored a total of 2 in the Exclusion category as compared to 11 observed frequencies recorded for the non-gifted children. The behavior, Whining, needs to be cautiously interpreted due to the low frequency occurrence: the gifted children showing 3 and the non-gifted children showing 0.

A chi-square test was performed between positive and negative physical behaviors, indicating statistically significant differences between the gifted and non-gifted children. Some behaviors were heavily concentrated in some categories as compared with others, $x^2(1)= 6.77$, $p < .05$.

Insert Table II about here

Table II presents a summary of initiated physical social behaviors in gifted and non-gifted preschool children and indicates the Total Observed Frequency, Percentage of Sub-total Behaviors Within Category, Percentage of All Behaviors, and Percentage of All Children.

The Positive Physical Behaviors category showed numerical differences between both groups of gifted and non-gifted children. Smiling and Running with a Peer had almost a 30 point difference

in Observed Frequency. The gifted children had a numerical occurrence of 55 in the Smiling behavior versus 84 with the non-gifted children. Running with a Peer revealed an Observed Frequency of 8 with the gifted children and 41 Observed Frequencies with the non-gifted children. The most significant Positive Physical category behavior which occurred between the gifted and non-gifted children was the Sharing Materials category. Indeed, frequency significance was shown by a 118 point difference, with the non-gifted Observed Frequency score of 141 compared to the gifted score of 23.

The Negative Physical Behaviors category had only two significant Observed Frequency differences between the gifted and non-gifted children. Threat by Jesture showed the gifted children with a score of 4 and the non-gifted children with a score of 14. The second significant numerical difference occurred in the Grab behavior: the gifted children scored 3 over the non-gifted children who scored 0.

Tables I and II summarize the total behaviors of both gifted and non-gifted preschool children. The two significant percentage readings were in Table II and are related to Positive Physical Behavior. In the column, Percentage of All Behaviors, the major differences were in the behaviors Sharing Materials

and Smiling. Of particular difference is the Smiling percentage for the gifted children of 21% as compared to the non-gifted children's percentage of 15. As noted earlier, in the Observed Frequency category, the non-gifted children scored 29 points above the gifted children in the Smiling category.

The zero occurrences were primarily occupied by the non-gifted children in four different behaviors: Compliment, Concern, and Whining in Table I, and Grab in Table II. On the other hand, the gifted children had only one zero frequency occurrence in the behavior, Kick, of Table II. Of course, the Observed Frequency scores need to be cautiously interpreted because of low incidence of behavior in several categories.

Discussion

The analysis of verbal and physical behaviors in gifted and non-gifted preschool children resulted in a clarification of these social behaviors and a comparison of these two groups of children. Comparative studies such as Roedell's et al. (1980) work on linguistic differences between gifted and non-gifted children and the current study reveal the existence of important differences in social behaviors for these groups. For example, the Positive Verbal behaviors (Conversation, Compliment, Concern, Laughing, Singing) were not significantly greater for

the non-gifted children. The low incidence of Total Physical Behaviors for the gifted children (115 versus 312) suggests that the behavioral orientation of these preschool children may serve to minimize physical behaviors. Most important, the academic precocity of the gifted children strikes an interesting parallel to the low incidence of physical behavior. This contrast suggests that the gifted children might be more concerned with questioning, challenging, and creating behaviors that are diametrically opposed to interactive behaviors such as holding hands and sharing materials. The importance of cognitive behavior might be a prerequisite to operational definitions between positive and negative (verbal and physical) behaviors. Such a definition has important methodological implications for future research with gifted children. For example, the total incidence of all behaviors for gifted children was lower than the non-gifted children (259 versus 542), providing further evidence that gifted children are concerned with other behaviors that are outside of the range of existing behavioral coding schema. Also, it is interesting to note the relational aspects of the positive and negative verbal behavior of gifted and non-gifted children. The observations of Positive Verbal Behavior provide evidence of a different behavioral

orientation for the gifted children, as a detailed investigation of occurrence of Positive Verbal Behaviors indicate a low incidence (129 versus 209) for the gifted group. Moreover, analysis of Negative Verbal Behaviors indicate the same trend (144 versus 230) of low incidence for gifted children. These datum further augment the observation that behavioral coding of intellectual behaviors in gifted children might reveal cognitive-oriented behaviors. Specifically, these intellectual behaviors might explain the low incidence of Positive Verbal (Conversation, Compliment, Concern, Laughing, Singing) and Negative Verbal (Name Calling, Reprimand, Exclusion, Abrasive Language, Whining) behavior. Indeed, research with gifted children (Horne & Dupuy, 1981; Robinson et al., 1978; Roedell et al., 1980) has indicated that negative behaviors are minimal. The investigation of cognitive dimensions of behavior would likely result in better empirical distinctions between the behavior of gifted and non-gifted children.

Differences on both Positive Physical and Positive Verbal Behaviors may indicate developmental differences in gifted preschool children. Among gifted children, reading ability, language, and social skills seem to be at a higher status ranking. It is possible, because of this advantage in precocity

that these different skills might produce a different hierarchy of social behaviors. The finding that gifted children engage in less Positive Physical and Positive Verbal Behavior seems to indicate a different status ranking for these behaviors, which could be inversely related to the status ranking of developmental skills. A low incidence in the number of Positive Physical and Negative Physical Behaviors may well facilitate the exploration of developmental differences between gifted and non-gifted children. Perhaps the present differences in these behaviors reflect a particular phase of development when these behaviors become less dominant for gifted preschool children. The presence of such developmental differences would imply that the gifted children have passed through the early social development stage before their counterparts. Thus, these particular behaviors have become more infrequent among the gifted group, as they have advanced to another stage of development that may have a cognitive paradigm. This trend of analysis would promote the speculation that the gifted children are not deficit, but different, in their hierarchy of social behaviors.

In conclusion, we observed differences in frequency of Positive Verbal and Positive Physical Behaviors, with the non-gifted children exhibiting a higher rate of these behaviors than gifted

children. However, frequency of behavior does not determine the importance or status of the behavior. It is important to note the low incidence of verbal and physical behaviors among the gifted group. The relationship of this low incidence to cognitive and social development in the gifted child is an important research question. Investigation of cognitive and social skills areas will require the development of an observational coding scheme, perhaps combined with other constitutional and intelligence measures, in order to examine individual and group differences. It seems important that continued research related to gifted children's behavior will eventually provide more information into the understanding of gifted and non-gifted children. Such understandings are important for adequate development and refinement of individual and group educational programs to develop the potential of all children.

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Table I

Summary of Initiated Verbal Behavior In Gifted and Non-Gifted Preschool Children

	Gifted Preschool Children				Non-Gifted Preschool Children			
Behaviors	Observed Frequency	% of Sub-total Within Category	% of All Behaviors	% of All Children	Observed Frequency	% of Sub-total Within Category	% of All Behaviors	% of All Children
Positive Verbal								
Greeting	22	17	8	68	54	26	10	100
Conversation	69	53	27	95	133	64	25	100
Compliment	4	3	2	16	0	0	0	0
Concern	8	6	3	26	0	0	0	0
Laughing	24	19	9	63	17	8	3	56
Singing	2	2	1	10	5	2	1	5
Sub-total	129	100%	50%	...	209	100%	39%	...
Negative Verbal								
Name Calling	4	27	2	15	4	19	1	21
Reprimand	5	33	2	10	5	24	1	10
Exclusion	2	13	1	5	11	52	2	26
Abrasive Language	1	7	0	5	1	5	0	5
Whining	3	20	1	5	0	0	0	0
Sub-total	15	100%	6%	...	21	100%	4%	...
Total Verbal Behaviors	144	...	56%	...	230	...	43%	...

$x^2(1) = .129$, $p < .05$

Table II

Summary of Initiated Physical Behavior of Gifted and Non-Gifted Preschool Children

	Gifted Preschool Children				Non-Gifted Preschool Children			
Behaviors	Observed Frequency	% of Sub-total Within Category	% of All Behaviors	% of All Children	Observed Frequency	% of Sub-total Within Category	% of All Behaviors	% of All Children
Positive Physical								
Hug	3	3	1	15	4	1	1	10
Pat	1	1	0	5	10	4	2	26
Holding Hands	2	2	1	10	1	0	0	5
Sharing Materials	23	25	9	80	141	50	26	100
Smiling	55	60	21	80	84	30	15	89
Running with a Peer	8	9	3	31	41	15	7	52
Sub-total	92	100%	35%	...	281	100%	51%	...
Negative Physical								
Threat by Jesture	4	17	2	5	14	45	3	32
Push	8	35	3	15	9	29	2	37
Grab	5	22	2	5	0	0	0	0
Hit	1	4	0	10	1	3	0	5
Kick	0	0	0	0	2	7	0	10
Rock/Sand Throwing	5	22	2	10	5	16	1	10
Sub-total	23	100%	9%	...	31	100%	6%	...
Total Physical Behaviors	115	...	44%	...	312	...	57%	...

$x^2(1) = 6.77$, $p < .05$

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